Libel in Government

B.S. 3/27/66

If the State Department has been transmitting to its embassies abroad unevaluated and derogatory or accusatory information about American travelers it ought to stop it. It is gratifying to discover that Secretary of State Rusk is against this practice. It is welcome news that he is not satisfied that present procedures are correct. It is good to know he is investigating them. The investigation should not be long and the decision to end this business ought to be swiftly reached.

The Secretary has denied that citizens are being kept under any kind of surveillance abroad. There is no more occasion for scrutinizing the utterances or associations of law-abiding Americans abroad than there is for that sort of scrutiny at home. It is disquieting to think anything remotely resembling such a check may have occurred in the past. It is the Department's business to see to it that it does not take place in the future.

It might be a good thing to broaden the inquiry to include an investigation of the dissemination within the Government here in the United States of unevaluated derogatory information. This is a species of libel upon the good name of an individual against which the victimized citizen so far has found no suitable defense.